

“Moral” judgments

Judgments of “Right” & “Wrong”

Research Definition: Morality judgments include (1) *obligation* & (2) *punishments*

Lawrence Kohlberg

“Moral Development”

As the brain develops abilities to *think differently*, we make moral decisions based on different “reasons” (reasoning)

Kohlberg: Moral Reasoning

QUESTION: Should Heinz steal the drug?

It isn't *WHAT* you think: "I think Heinz should (or should not) steal the drug"

It's the PROCESS used for thinking:
WHY do you think it is moral/immoral?
(what are the *reasons*?)

There's a runaway train heading towards a track with 5 workers. It will surely kill all five. You can flip a switch to change the train's path where it will run onto a track with (and surely killing) 1 worker. Will you hit the switch?

There's a runaway train heading
towards a track with 5 workers.
It will surely kill all five...

...You're standing on a
footbridge next to a very large
man. You can push him into the
path of the train, stopping the
train from running onto the track
with the 5 workers, but it will
surely kill the very large man.
Will you push him?

Research Finds

Most people quickly respond
“yes” to flipping the switch

Most people, a bit more slowly,
respond “no” to pushing the guy

First - Pre-Conventional: “Right” is “*good for me*” & “Wrong” is “*bad for me*” (egocentric children)

Also: No focus on *intention*, only focus on outcome (e.g., “We didn’t get caught...”)

First - Pre-Conventional:

Second - Conventional: “Right” is
conforming to social norms/
expectations & “Wrong” is not
conforming

Customs OR laws

Research finds most adults usually
make moral decisions at the
conventional level

Post-Conventional & “The Law”

NOT: Something is moral
BECAUSE it is legal

BUT: Something should be legal
BECAUSE it is moral

QUESTIONING whether *laws and
social norms are “just”*

First - Pre-Conventional: “Right” is “good for me” & “Wrong” is “bad for me” (egocentric children)

Second - Conventional: “Right” is conforming to social norms/ expectations & “Wrong” is not conforming

Third - Post-Conventional: There are “moral” principles of “right” and “wrong” from which we must draw *consistent logical conclusions*

Moral judgments drawn logically
from “moral principles”

Moral Principle: A “generalizable”
response to the following

“A behavior is immoral if...”

We can compare a *specific
behavior* to see if falls within the
moral principle

Moral Principle: A “generalizable”
response to the following

“A behavior is immoral if...”

...it intentionally causes unsolicited
harm

We can compare a *specific behavior* to see if falls within the *moral principle*

Is unprovoked face-punching immoral?

Yes, because it intentionally causes unsolicited harm

IMPORTANT: *Consistency!!!*

Steven Pinker (*The Blank Slate*)

“(T)he good reasons for a moral position are not pulled out of thin air...

“...they always have to do with what makes people *better off or worse off*,
and...

“...are grounded in the *logic* that we have to *treat other people in the way that we demand they treat us.*”

“HARM - “...what makes people better off or worse off...”

“FAIRNESS” - “...*we...treat other people in the way that we demand they treat us...*”

Goal: Consistently applied moral principles

HARM & FAIRNESS

Are there specific moral
BEHAVIORS?

Or are moral behaviors a function of
their CONSEQUENCES?

Are moral behaviors a function
of their CONSEQUENCES?

Moral Philosophy -

Utilitarianism: A behavior is
moral if it results in *the greatest
good* for the greatest number

Are there specific moral BEHAVIORS?

Moral Philosophy - Deontology:
There are specific *moral rules* that
cannot be broken (lying, killing,
etc.) – it is about specific
behaviors

Deontology

Kant: Humans have “*intrinsic dignity*”: we have our own *goals* and we guide our conduct by *reason*

SO: Morality is allowing people to use their “*rational free will*”

SO: Allow people to *do as they choose* (as long as they’re doing the same)



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Welcome to YourMorals.org, where you can learn about your own morality, ethics, and/or values, while also contributing to scientific research. We are a group of professors and graduate students in social psychology at the University of Virginia, The University of California (Irvine), and the University of Southern California. (See us [here](#).)

Our goal is to understand the way our "moral minds" work. Why do people disagree so passionately about what is right? Why, in particular, is there such hostility and incomprehension between members of different political parties? By filling out a few of our surveys, you'll help us answer those questions. We, in return, will give you an immediate report on how you scored on each study, quiz, or survey. We'll show you how your responses compare to others and we'll tell you what that might say about you.

So please join us and [register](#), then begin [exploring your morality](#). Registration takes just 2 minutes, and it will allow us to hold your scores for you so that you may return at any time and continue to build up your "morality profile." This site is a non-profit academic venture, with no fees or advertising. We will guard your [privacy](#) carefully.

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Moral objectivism across the lifespan

James R. Beebe & David Sackris

Philosophical Psychology 29 (6):912-929 (2016)

Abstract We report the results of two studies that examine folk metaethical judgments about the objectivity of morality. We found that participants attributed almost as much objectivity to ethical statements as they did to statements of physical fact and significantly more objectivity to ethical statements than to statements about preferences or tastes. In both studies, younger participants attributed less objectivity to ethical statements than older participants. Females were observed to attribute slightly less objectivity to ethical statements than males, and we found important interactions between attributions of objectivity and other factors, such as how strong participants' moral opinions were and how much disagreement about the issue they perceived to exist within society. We believe our results have significant implications for debates about the nature of folk morality and about the nature of morality in general.

Keywords No keywords specified ([fix it](#))

Categories [Philosophy of Cognitive Science](#)
([categorize this paper](#))

Each subject got a set of statements to assess. Some were factual in nature - “Flagstaff is further north than Phoenix,” for example...Other statements were matters of taste or preference, such as “Rap music is better than rock music.” And still others were ethical claims, like “Hitting someone just because you feel like it is wrong.”

(...S)ubjects (were asked) to consider that someone else might disagree with them about those statements. “Is it possible for both of you to be correct, or must one of you be mistaken?”

(S)ubjects’ views about the objectivity of moral claims varied from one statement to another...*Don’t be racist* (was absolute for [most] all), not a matter of opinion. *Don’t desecrate the American flag* struck about half as a moral truth and the other half as being subject to debate.

Moral dumbfounding: When people feel strongly that something is wrong but cannot *explain why...*

The “Yuk” factor: It is immoral if I find it *disgusting*

Is 'Do Unto Others' Written Into Our Genes?

By [NICHOLAS WADE](#)

Where do moral rules come from? From reason, some philosophers say. From God, say believers. Seldom considered is a source now being advocated by some biologists, that of evolution.

At first glance, natural selection and the survival of the fittest may seem to reward only the most selfish values. But for animals that live in groups, selfishness must be strictly curbed or there will be no advantage to social living. Could the behaviors evolved by social animals to make societies work be the foundation from which human morality evolved?

In a series of recent articles and a book, "The Happiness Hypothesis," Jonathan Haidt, a moral psychologist at the [University of Virginia](#), has been constructing a broad evolutionary view of morality that traces its connections both to religion and to politics.

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“...Jonathan Haidt, a *moral psychologist* ...has been constructing a *broad evolutionary view of morality* that traces its connections both to religion and to politics.”

EVO-PSY: Is morality a part of
“human nature”?

(1) *EVO-PSY*: If it is seen *before*
“learning”

(2) *EVO-PSY*: If it is seen in *non-*
human species

(3) *EVO-PSY*: If it is seen in *all*
cultures

(1) Harm/Care

(2) Fairness/Reciprocity

(3) *Ingroup/Loyalty*: The US Flag

(4) *Authority/Respect*: Lying to
Dying Mom

(5) *Purity/Sanctity*: Eating Dog/Sex
with frozen chicken/sibling

Is 'Do Unto Others' Written Into Our Genes?

“(F)or animals that live in groups, selfishness must be strictly curbed or there will be no advantage to social living. Could the behaviors evolved by social animals to make societies work be the foundation from which human morality evolved?”

- (1) Harm/Care
- (2) Fairness/Reciprocity
- (3) *Ingroup/Loyalty*
- (4) *Authority/Respect*
- (5) *Purity/Sanctity*

All improve chances of *group survival*